

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF H 5789 & H 6090:
Temporary Disability Insurance**

TO: Chair Marvin Abney and members of the House Committee on Finance

FROM: Victoria Picinich, Resident of Warwick, RINOW member

DATE: May 4, 2021

Thank You, Chair Abney, and members of the House Committee on Finance for the opportunity to share my thoughts. My name is Victoria Picinich and I am testifying in support of H5789 and H6090. I am a homeowner in Warwick, in Rep. Bennet's district.

H5789 and H6090 strengthen and make vital improvements to the Temporary Disability Insurance. Unfortunately, just adding weeks to the existing TDI and TCI programs is not going to improve access for low-income families. Data shows that low-income families are paying into the TCI program but are not taking the leave at the same rates as higher income families (2020 National Partnership for Women and Families). National research shows that low-income families don't take leave if they don't have adequate income to make ends meet. So it is absolutely essential that RI increase wage replacement rates for our TCI program so we can reach our lowest income families with new babies! It is also very important to extend the number of weeks of paid leave to 12 weeks! Now is the time to expand and make these great programs even better for working families.

When I gave birth to my child in 2017, I was fortunate to be able to use both the Temporary Caregiver Insurance and Medical Leave program to take a maternity leave of 14 weeks. Even with those programs, our finances were stretched very thin given that I received only a portion of my wages. As anyone who has a child knows, babies are expensive and require a lot of items to care for them, including but not limited to; diapers, wipes, onesies, blankets, crib, mattress, formula, bottles, breast pumping supplies, medicine, diaper cream...the list goes on.

After my 14 weeks of leave (which was nowhere near enough for me, I would have loved to have stayed home with my child for a few months longer but couldn't afford to take more time off or lose my position), my partner was able to use the Temporary Caregiver Insurance program to take 4 weeks of leave from his job. Those four weeks that my child was at home with her father, as opposed to with a child care provider, helped my transition to being a working mother tremendously. I only wish both my partner and I could have been able to take more time off during our child's early life. Going back to work so soon after giving birth was detrimental to my mental health. I developed a severe case of postpartum depression and needed counseling and medication to treat it.

I encourage you and all members of the Committee to prioritize the needs of families and pass these bills.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Victoria Picinich

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